

ITEM 7e

Somerset Rivers Authority Board Paper

Title: Brue catchment update

RECOMMENDATION

The SRA Board is asked to:

1. Note the latest position with projects in the Brue catchment.
2. Confirm support for the need to identify options other than the originally planned de-silting works to make use of LEP funds allocated to the Brue catchment by March 2021.
3. Agree to review alternative proposals for works in the Brue Catchment between now and the next Board meeting to ensure progress is made quickly.

Purpose of the item:

This paper is a progress update on SRA funded proposals for work on the River Brue and in the Brue catchment. The paper summarises the latest position and some of the challenges experienced in moving the project forward.

Background and context

In financial year 2015/16 using funding provided by the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (HotSWLEP) the SRA Board agreed to allocate £500,000 towards capital works that would optimise the capacity of the River Brue. The proposed works included updating the hydraulic model of the Brue, tree removal works, river bank improvements and desilting between Westhay and North Drain Pumping Station. HotSWLEP funds must be used by March 2021.

An SRA Board Paper was submitted in December 2017 to bring attention to the challenges experienced delivering SRA work in the Brue catchment. The challenges were as a result of the need to comply with environmental and regulatory constraints and deliver a legally compliant scheme.

In an effort to overcome these challenges the SRA Board requested that a 'Brue Plan' workshop should be held in early 2018 to investigate the potential for a more holistic catchment wide approach to managing flooding in the Brue catchment. The aim would be to ensure flooding issues are addressed and projects with multiple benefits are promoted increasing the likelihood of gaining all necessary approvals to deliver works.

It was clear from the meeting that there is strong support for the development of a holistic Brue Plan that provides a framework for future SRA projects in the catchment but still a lack of consensus on the need for dredging.

Latest Status

The Brue projects have been led by the Axe Brue Internal Drainage Board (IDB) on behalf of the SRA. When the funding was originally secured from the Heart of the South West LEP it was assumed that the main focus of works would be on dredging in the Brue. The IDB agreed to lead the project as dredging sits comfortably within their organisation's area of expertise. For the reasons set out above it became clear that a broader package of works would be required which needs the expertise of a range of delivery partners.

In December 2018 the IDB took the decision to step back from leading the project as it was felt that it was unlikely that a scheme to dredge the Brue between Westhay and North Drain Pumping Station would be able to secure the necessary approvals in time to meet the funding deadline of March 2021. Uncertainty over whether a proposal to dredge could gain approvals in time presented a financial risk to the IDB; should some LEP funds be spent but works not delivered then the IDB could be liable for paying back funds spent to date.

Somerset Catchment Partnership has initiated a project to develop a long-term strategy for the Brue Catchment and is convening workshops to develop this strategy. The Environment Agency has also started to look in more detail at the Brue catchment, but this work is at a very early stage.

Next steps

The SRA Senior Manager is working with SRA partners and stakeholders to seek a consensus on the best option for making use of the capital funds currently allocated towards the Brue.

The aim is to have identified a suitable use of the funds by late March.

Risk

Should it not be possible to identify a capital scheme, or schemes, which can be delivered in the time available it may be necessary to ask the SRA Board to reallocate the funding to another suitable project and request approval to do this from the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership.

RECOMMENDATION

The SRA Board is asked to:

1. Note the latest position with projects in the Brue catchment.
2. Confirm support for the need to identify options other than the originally planned desilting works to make use of LEP funds allocated to the Brue catchment by March 2021.
3. Agree to review alternative proposals for works in the Brue Catchment between now and the next Board meeting to ensure progress is made quickly.

Date: February 21, 2019

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